

Sixth Annual Report

April 1, 1988 to
March 31, 1989

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Ecological Reserves Program,
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September 30, 1989

Office of
the Minister

The Honourable Dr. David Carter
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Sir:

I have the honour of transmitting the Sixth Annual Report of
the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological
Reserves.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Stephen C. West
Minister
Alberta Recreation and Parks

September 30, 1989

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Minister of Recreation and Parks
107 Legislature Building
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

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Respectfully submitted,



Donn E. Cline,
Chairman
Advisory Committee on Wilderness
Areas and Ecological Reserves

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Now . . . and forever





Donn E. Cline, Chairman
Advisory Committee on Wilderness
Areas and Ecological Reserves

With the completion of its sixth year, the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves is pleased with the progress made in establishing ecological reserves, as well as the enhancement of public awareness and support for the program. The past year saw the establishment of the eleventh ecological reserve, Upper Bob Creek, an area of 2,601 hectares representative of the Montane Subregion of the Rocky Mountain Natural Region.

The increase in public support for ecological reserves reflects a greater understanding of the long-term benefits of protecting representative examples of the province's varied landscapes. This understanding stems from an increased awareness and concern nationally and internationally for the protection of threatened ecosystems.

To date, 11 ecological reserves have been established, encompassing 21,116.8 hectares. Management plans for several of the designated reserves, as well as guidelines for conducting academic research in ecological reserves are underway.

One of the priorities for the upcoming year will be to enhance public understanding of the Ecological Reserves Program. A new brochure on the program has been developed and an ecological reserves video is intended to be developed in the future.

The advisory committee participated in the national meeting of the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA) hosted by Alberta in August of 1989.

One of the purposes of the CCEA is to share ideas and achievements among program administrators, professionals and the public, related to furthering the objectives of conservation with specific emphasis on ecological reserves.

The advisory committee looks forward to continuing in its efforts to respond to public opinion and input regarding the Ecological Reserves Program and to advise the government by way of recommendations to the Minister of Recreation and Parks.

The Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves has been appointed to represent the interests of the general public as they pertain to wilderness areas and ecological reserves and to advise the Minister of Recreation and Parks on matters relevant to those interests.

The guiding principle in the work of the advisory committee is reconciling the system of wilderness areas and ecological reserves in Alberta with the many interests of the public as a whole.

The advisory committee was established pursuant to Section 2 of the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act, 1981. The role of the Advisory Committee as set out in Section 2(7) of the Act is as follows:

2(7) The advisory committee shall receive and consider requests from the public regarding wilderness areas and ecological reserves and may make recommendations to the minister regarding:

- (a) the establishment of new wilderness areas or ecological reserves;
- (b) the addition of lands to wilderness areas or ecological reserves;
- (c) withdrawal of lands from wilderness areas or ecological reserves; and
- (d) the making of regulations for the administration, management, operation and utilization of wilderness areas, ecological reserves and controlled buffer zones.

The committee's role is advisory and does not include the authority to make decisions. The ultimate responsibility for decision-making on all matters relevant to wilderness areas and ecological reserves rests with the Minister of Recreation and Parks.

Membership of the advisory committee is set out in the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act as follows:

- 2(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council shall establish a committee called the "Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves" consisting of 12 members, and shall designate one of the members as chairman.
- (2) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may prescribe the term of office of any member of the committee or the term of office of the chairman.
- (3) The minister shall designate a member of the advisory committee as secretary to the committee.
- (4) The advisory committee shall consist of:
 - (a) two employees of the Department of Recreation and Parks,
 - (b) three employees of Alberta Energy and Natural Resources, (presently Department of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife and Department of Energy),
 - (c) one employee of Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, and
 - (d) six persons who are not employed by the government or a government agency.



Members of the advisory committee

the advisory committee as appointed by Order-In-Council are:

Front row (left to right): **Larry Duchesne**, Secretary, Alberta Recreation and Parks; **Donn E. Cline**, Chairman, Alberta Recreation and Parks; **Michael Day**, Alberta Energy; **Thomas Gilchrist**, Milk River.

Back row (left to right): **Peter Orlecki**, Two Hills; **Murray Turnbull**, Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife; **Christian Andersen**, Grande Prairie; **William Byrne**, Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism; **Leslie Cooke**, Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife; **Ken Kultgen**, Foremost; **Fauser**, Lethbridge; **Jack Clements**, Edmonton; **Kultgen**, Foremost.

Ecological reserves are areas set aside as examples of naturally functioning ecosystems representative of the six Natural Regions of Alberta (see Map 1).

Biological, geographical or geological features that are rare, unusual or otherwise special are also protected.

The Alberta government recognizes that the preservation of natural environments and the plants and animals they sustain is fundamental to advances in industries such as agriculture, forestry and medicine. As such, these protected areas serve as outdoor classrooms and laboratories for environmental education and scientific research. They also allow us an opportunity to study how natural processes shape the environment. Perhaps most importantly, they are the tangible evidence of Alberta's commitment to share the land with its other inhabitants.

The Ecological Reserves Program currently has 11 reserves designated by Order-in-Council. These are:

Crow Lake is predominantly northern mixed wood forest; an area of upland spruce, pine and aspen. Uncommon patterned fens, extensive shore marsh and boggy areas of larch and dwarf birch are also present.

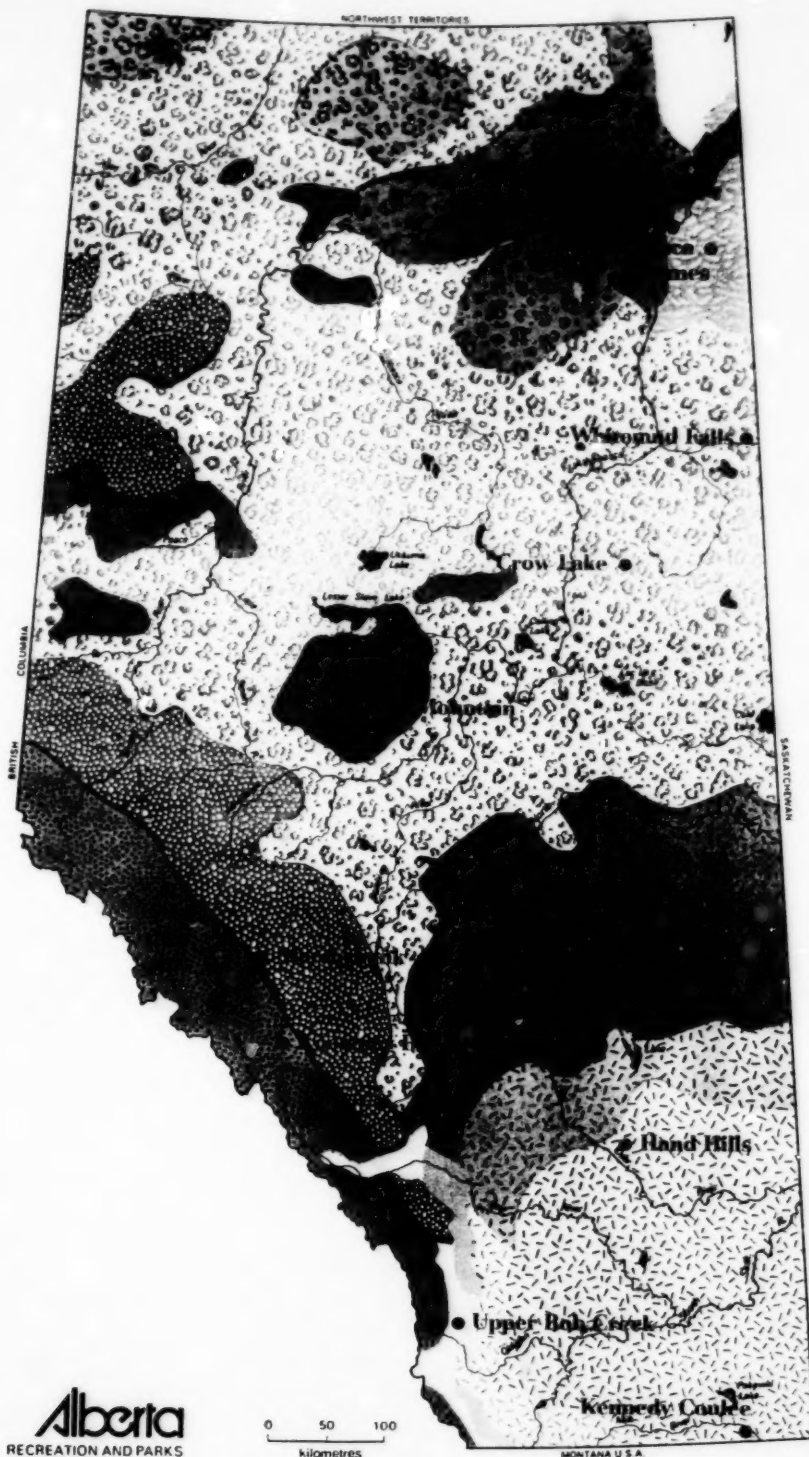
Low levels of human disturbance have allowed bald eagles, woodland caribou and rare plants to exist in this area.

Goose Mountain is a part of the highest portion of the Swan Hills upland which was not glaciated during the last Ice Age. It rests on top of non-marine shales and sandstone and is dominated by stands of fir, spruce and pine.

Animal species present are characteristic of the foothills environment and include several disjunct populations. Goose Mountain Ecological Reserve is representative of the Northern Outlier Subregion of the Foothills Natural Region.

Map 1

Ecological Reserves and Natural Regions of Alberta



Natural Regions of Alberta

Grassland

- Mixed
- Northern Fescue
- Foothills

Parkland

- Central
- Foothills
- Peace River

Foothills

- Main
- Northern Outliers

Boreal Forest

- Sub Arctic
- Hay River
- Peace River Lowlands
- Mixed Wood

Rocky Mountain

- Montane
- Sub Alpine
- Alpine

Canadian Shield

- Kazan Upland
- Athabasca Plain

● Ecological Reserves

Plant communities at Silver Valley are strongly influenced by the Peac River valley slopes bordering the reserve's northern boundary as well as the numerous tributary creeks running through the area. An old burn has left most of the area vegetated with a maturing aspen/shrub forest. Common wildlife species include moose, wolf and the Tennessee warbler.

Kootenay Plains is part of a steep valley within the Front Ranges of the Rocky Mountains. The geomorphology and low precipitation are typical of the Montane Subregion of the Rocky Mountain Natural Region in which the reserve is found. These factors have maintained the grassland environment of this area. Limber pine forests, wetlands and calcareous cliffs are also present. Many rare plant species occur here including one-flowered goldenweed.

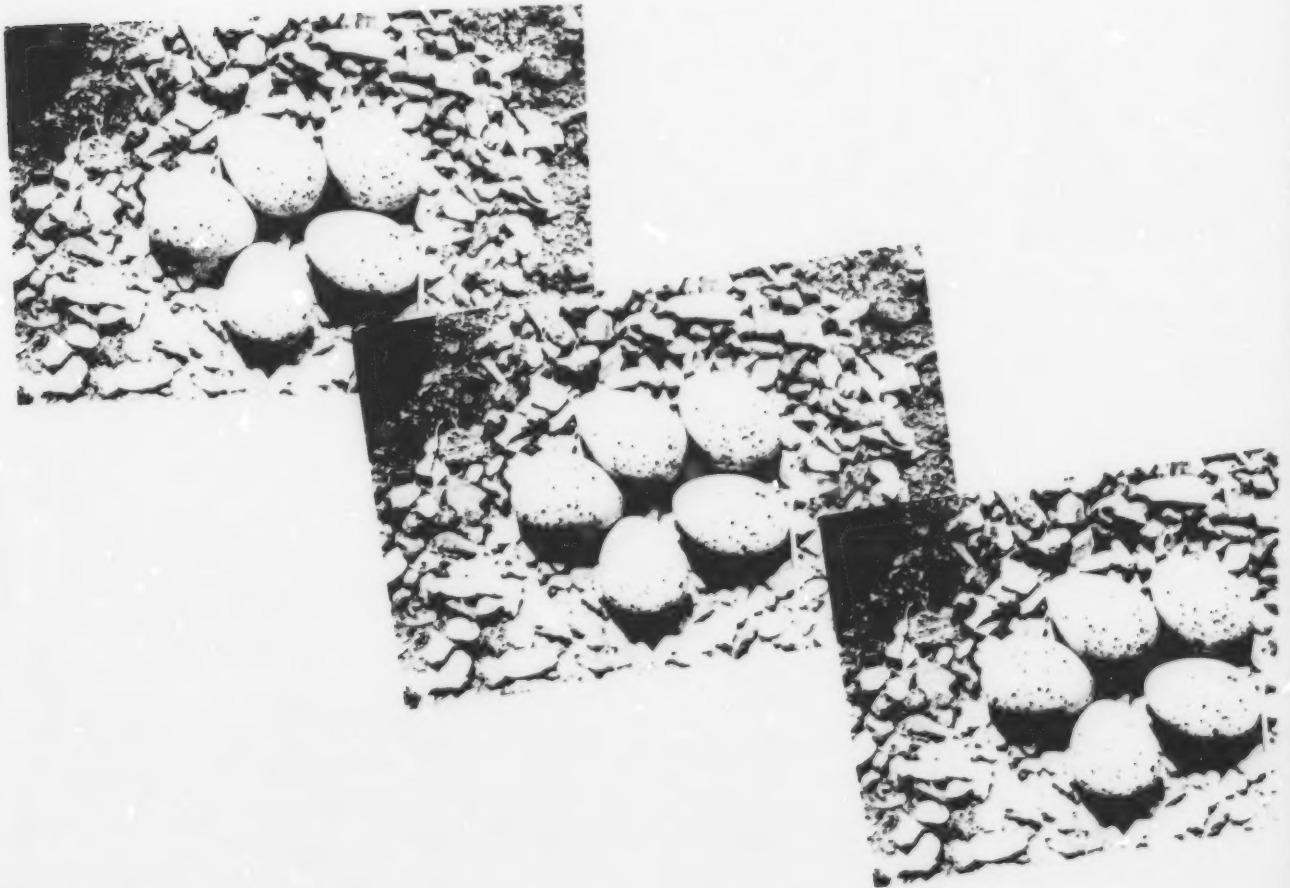
Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve has its southern boundary resting on the Canada/U.S. border. The coulee area itself is the only variation in an otherwise flat landscape. True to the Mixed Grass Subregion in which it is found, the uplands are dominated by blue grama/wheatgrass/speargrass associations. Numerous springs and ponds are a few of the special features found in this area. Several rare and peripheral species also occur in this relatively undisturbed environment, including the ferruginous hawk, shrubby evening primrose and short-horned lizard.

Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve is part of a larger area managed as a special environment. The rest of the area is known as the Milk River Natural Area.



Athabasca Dunes in the remote Canadian Shield Natural Region of northeast Alberta was created through glacial and wind action on sandstone and granite. The result is dune systems dotted with jackpine woodlands, grass communities and dry black spruce bogs. There is a single, large active transverse dune migrating southeastwards.

Hand Hills is a natural grassland remnant which has survived several periods of extensive erosion. Several steep-sided drainage valleys cut through the area and a system of high rolling hills are present in the southern portion. The ecological reserve lies within the Northern Fescue Subregion of the Grassland Natural Region and contains a variety of grass communities, aspen woodlands, wet sloughs and shrublands. Sharp-tailed grouse, thirteen-lined ground squirrel and the rare piping plover make their home in Hand Hills Ecological Reserve.



Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve is representative of the Central Subregion of the Parkland Natural Region in Alberta. The reserve is part of a gently rolling sandy plain with dunes up to 30 metres high and a unique mixture of southern grasslands, boreal forest and parkland vegetation types. A large wetland complex exists within the reserve as does an unusual sloping fen. Rare, disjunct and peripheral plant and animal species also occur including showy everlasting and oblong-leaved sundew.

Marshybank has two distinct areas. The first is a terrace-like lowland of lodgepole pine, black spruce fens and willow/birch wetlands. The second is an area of extensive bedrock ridges with young lodgepole pine growing amidst mature stands of Engelmann spruce. These forest types are typical of the Main Foothills Subregion in which this reserve is located.



Whitemud Falls is located on the Clearwater River in the far east-central part of the province, within the Mixedwood Subregion of the Boreal Forest Natural Region. It contains aspen dominated mixed-wood forests, pine/lichen woodlands, willow shrublands and 25 metre dolomite stacks which are unique in Alberta. Over 20 rare, uncommon or disjunct vascular and non-vascular plants are provided habitat in the reserve's extensive and unique karst topography.

Upper Bob Creek contains a variety of vegetation types typical of the Montane Subregion of the Rocky Mountain Natural Region, including several douglas fir types, savannah areas, shrublands and grasslands. In addition to being an important elk wintering ground, it is home to 48 species of mammals and 103 species of birds, plus a variety of rare and uncommon plant species such as dwarf fleabane.

The locations of the established ecological reserves are illustrated on Map 1.





Plateau Mountain has been proposed to represent a portion of the Alpine and Sub-alpine Sub-regions of the Rocky Mountain Natural Region. Located southwest of Calgary, this area contains a unique array of stone circles, frost boils, rare plant and animal species, relic permafrost and an internationally renowned ice cave.

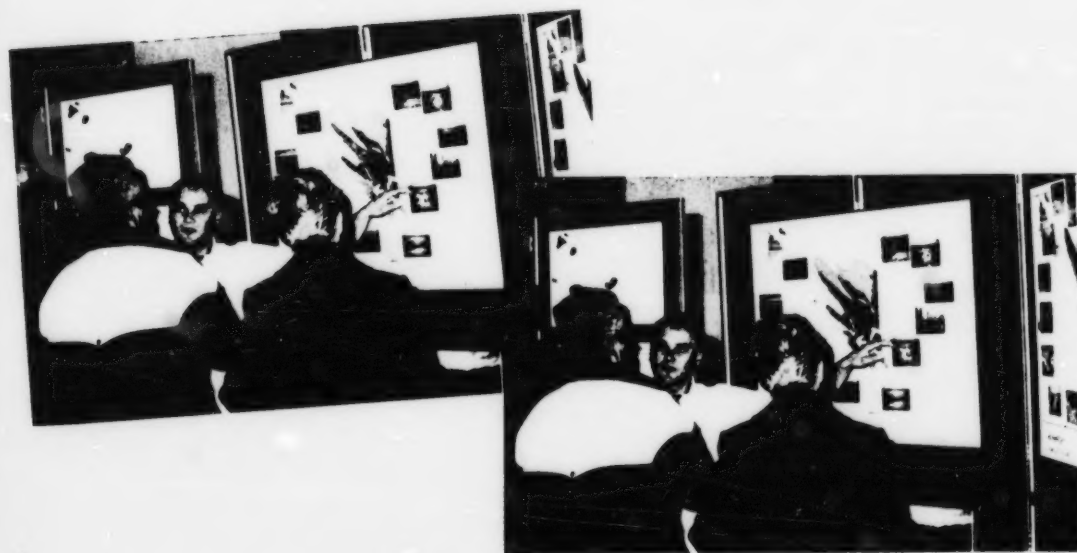
The advisory committee held a public open house to address Plateau Mountain Candidate Ecological Reserve. The open house was attended by approximately 50 individuals including representatives of various organizations and members of the general public. Following the open house, the advisory committee met to discuss the input received and began to formulate their recommendations for the area.



The advisory committee held a public open house to address Rumsey Candidate Ecological Reserve. The open house was attended by representatives of various organizations and members of the general public. The positive tenor of the event reflected the support for the establishment of Rumsey as an ecological reserve. This site has been proposed to represent a portion of the Central Parkland Natural Subregion. Its 3,400 hectares include lush fescue grassland, aspen woodland and a variety of shrub wetland habitats.

Based on the biophysical information and public input, initial recommendations were formulated for Rumsey and Plateau Mountain Candidate Ecological Reserves. The advisory committee also met to discuss the biophysical inventories planned for Alberta's three wilderness areas and their relation to management planning for the areas. The status of management planning for Ross Lake Candidate Ecological Reserve was also reviewed.

The advisory committee met to formulate final recommendations for Rumsey and Plateau Mountain Candidate Ecological Reserves. The status of the Ross Lake Candidate Ecological Reserve was examined to determine if a final recommendation could be made. Also discussed was the need for the overall co-ordination of conservation programs in Alberta, the meeting of the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas held in August of 1989 and how the advisory committee could contribute to the work of the Prairie Conservation Action Plan.



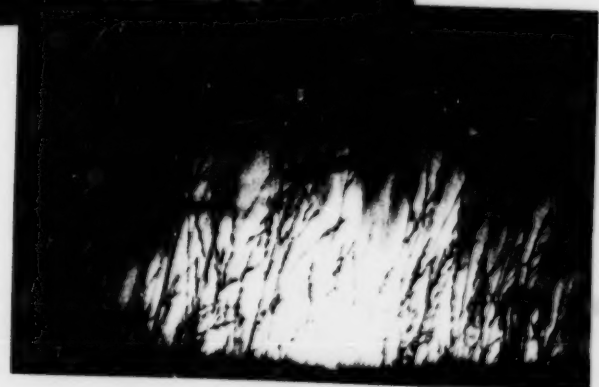
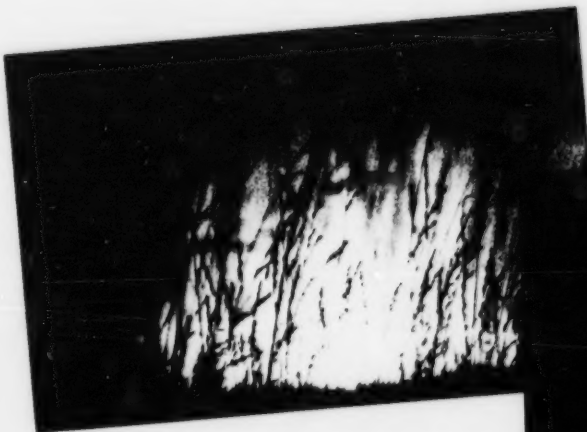
Based on biophysical reports,¹ input from written and verbal submissions and the studied consideration of its members, the Advisory Committee on Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves is pleased to make the following recommendations.

Of these, the first recommendation, Rumsey is ready to be implemented now. The second, Plateau Mountain, should await the completion of a special seismic program. The third, Ross Lake, is not being recommended at this time, pending future negotiation with local interest groups.

As illustrated on Map 2, the advisory committee recommends an area of 3,400 hectares (8,401.3 acres) be established as an ecological reserve.

The advisory committee also recommends that the Ecological Reserves Coordinating Committee develop a formula whereby the number of deer per square mile would be monitored annually, and become the basis for determining when hunting may be required to control deer populations.

It is recommended that public access be addressed in the management plan and that the conditions of access be worked out with the grazing lessee.

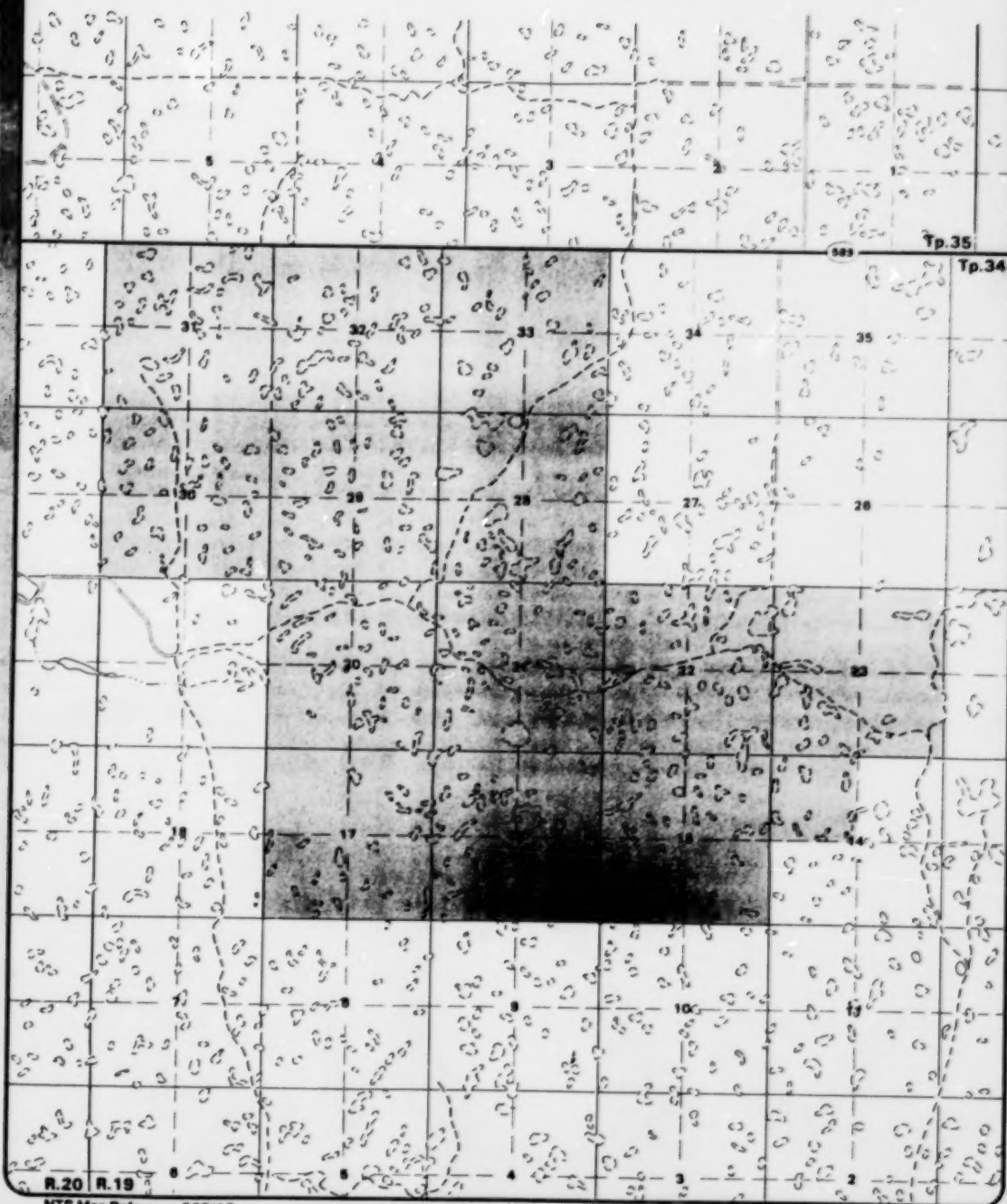


Map
Rumsey

1:50,000, West of 4th Meridian

■ Area recommended as Ecological Reserve

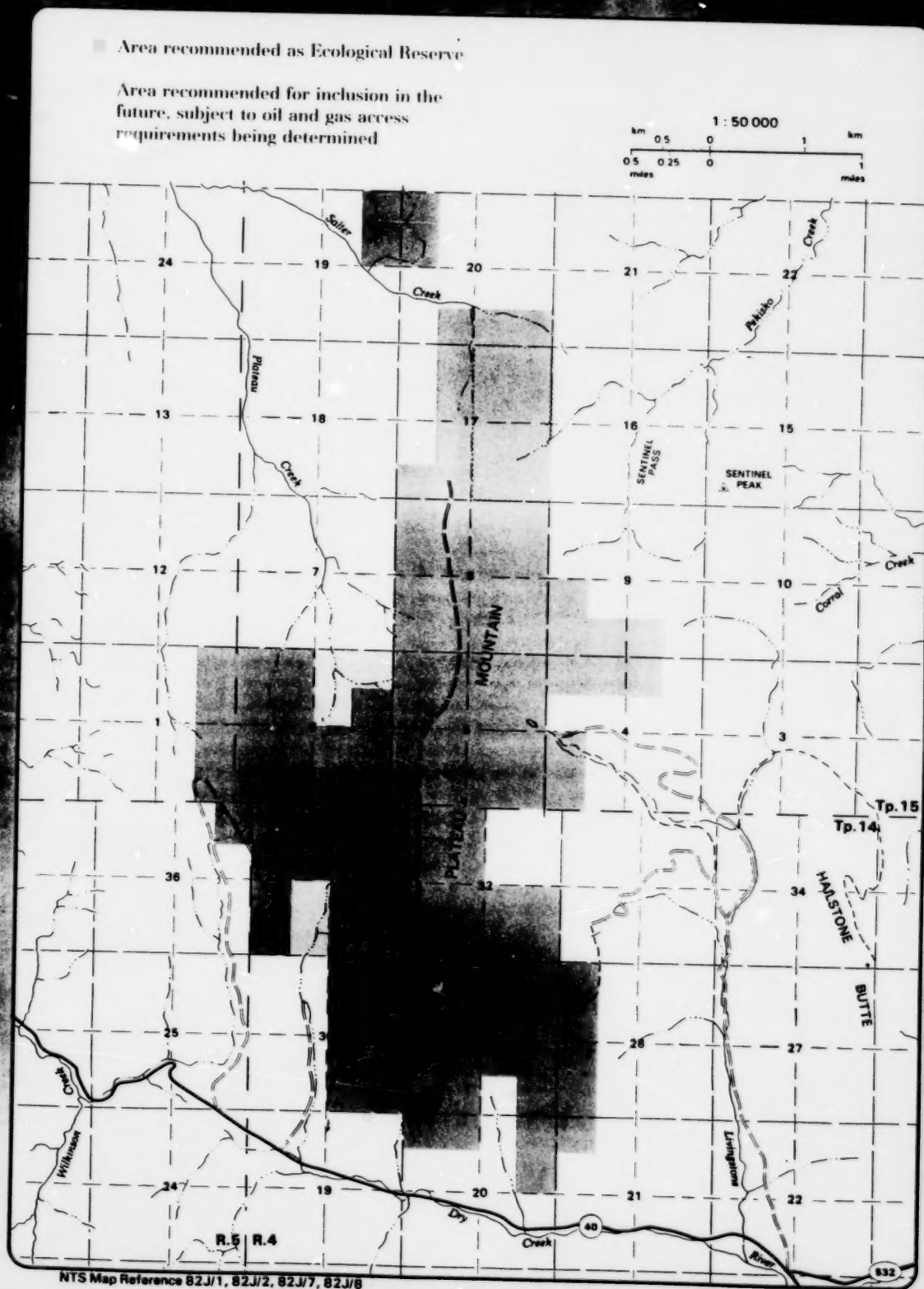
1 : 50 000
km 0.5 0 1 km
miles 0.25 0 1 miles



Map 1

Plateau Mountain

Tp. 14 and 15, R. 4 and 5, W. 1 and 2, 3rd Meridian



As illustrated on Map 3, the advisory committee recommends an area of 2,251.8 hectares (5,560 acres) be established as an ecological reserve.

It is also recommended that wildlife management, specifically with respect to the bighorn sheep population, be addressed by the Ecological Reserves Coordinating Committee during the development of a management plan for the area.

In order to determine the extent of the Savannah Creek gas field, it is recommended that an environmentally sensitive seismic program be carried out prior to the designation of the area as an ecological reserve.

Specific management implications related to Ross Lake Candidate Ecological Reserve were reviewed during a workshop with government and public interest groups. Although the review was successful in clarifying many of the original concerns raised, several unanswered questions remain. These questions were forwarded to the advisory committee in a report entitled, "Ross Lake Candidate Ecological Reserve - Workshop with Government and Public Interest Groups (1989)" in February of 1989. The advisory committee defers recommendations on the area until the remaining questions have been addressed.

